United Nations A/C.5/55/14

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 October 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 118
Programme planning

Impact of the format of the medium-term plan on the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to a request of the Committee for Programme and Coordination for an analysis of the implications of the format of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 on the cycle of programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. The new format complies fully with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8). Since the different phases of the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle are closely connected, the changed format of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 would provide for effective implementation of the subsequent phases of the cycle.

Introduction

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination, in its report on the first part of its fortieth session (A/55/16 (Part I) and Corr.1 and 2, para. 38), recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to report at its fifty-fifth session on the implications of the new format of the medium-term plan on the cycle of planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation in the context of the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations. The present report is submitted to the Assembly in response to that request.

Programme planning

2. As noted by the Secretary-General in the introduction to the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 (A/55/6 (Introduction), para. 10), the format of the proposed medium-term plan follows the requirements of the Regulations and Rules Governing

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Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8), including the revisions adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/207. The format of the proposed medium-term plan is new in the sense that the programme narrative, in comparison with medium-term plans of previous periods, has been more rigorously structured around the components identified in article IV of the Regulations and Rules: overall orientation, objectives, strategies, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement.

3. This structured approach to programme planning has required programme managers in the Secretariat to make a clear distinction between the objectives, strategies and expected accomplishments of each subprogramme and to reflect on how achievements can be assessed through the application of indicators of achievement. Although there is still room for improvement, subprogrammes have been formulated with a stronger sense of direction in terms of what is to be accomplished during the four-year period of the medium-term plan. Since the approved medium-term plan serves as the framework for the formulation of biennial programme budgets, the approach followed in preparing the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 also has implications for the other stages of the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle.

Programme budgeting

4. The objectives, strategies and expected accomplishments in the biennial programme budget will be derived directly from those in the medium-term plan so as to be consistent with and to strengthen the linkage between the medium-term plan and the programme budget. As a result, programme managers will again be required to adhere to the same conceptual distinction between objectives, strategies and expected accomplishments. The programme budget will continue to include a full listing of outputs. Requested resources will continue to be justified in terms of the requirements of output delivery, in accordance with regulation 5.3. Programme budget methodology would not be affected.

5. The General Assembly had previously requested that programme performance reports place more emphasis on qualitative analysis to reflect achievements in implementing programme activities (resolution 53/207, sect. V, para. 10). In this connection, rule 105.4 provides, among other things, that in the programme budget, expected accomplishments shall be expressed in terms that will facilitate the subsequent determination of whether the expectations have been met. Such a subsequent determination would necessarily rely on the use of assessment criteria by which achievements can be measured against expectations. As the proposed medium-term plan already contains such criteria in the form of indicators of achievement over a four-year period, the measurement of achievements over a two-year period would require the identification of indicators of achievement for each expected accomplishment included in the biennial programme budget. These will follow those in the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 but would be developed to a more detailed and operational level for the two-year period.

Monitoring and evaluation

6. Rule 106.1 (a) (ii) requires that at the end of the biennium, the actual progress made towards achieving expected accomplishments should be determined, as measured by the delivery of final outputs, in comparison with the commitments set out in the programme narratives of the programme budget. As indicated by the Secretary-General in his report on ways in which the full implementation and the quality of mandated programmes and activities could be ensured and could be better assessed by and reported to Member States (A/54/117), one way for improving assessment of the quality of programme performance would be to relate outputs to outcomes. The inclusion of expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement in the proposed medium-term plan for 2002-2005 would therefore have an impact on the monitoring exercise related to biennial programme performance by adding a qualitative aspect to existing quantitative measurements.

7. Regulation 7.1 (a) states that the objective of evaluation is to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities in relation to their objectives. In the proposed medium-term plan for 2002-2005, an attempt was made to provide a solid basis for implementing regulation 7.1

by formulating more clearly the objectives of each programme and subprogramme. Furthermore, the inclusion of indicators of achievement is an important step in complying with rule 107.1 (b), which requires that baseline data and indicators of achievement be utilized in the evaluation process to assess programme impact in terms of the objectives.

Conclusion

8. The format of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 follows the requirements set out in the Regulations and Rules. Since the different phases of the programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle are closely connected, the format of the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 will also provide for more effective implementation of the subsequent phases of the cycle.